



# SPAIN

## THE REVOLUTION OF 1936

The golden lemon is not made  
but grows on a green tree :  
A strong man with his crystal eyes  
is a man born free.

The oxen pass under the yoke  
and the blind are led at will :  
But a man born free has a path of his own  
and a house on the hill.

And men are men who till the soil  
and women are women who weave :  
Fifty men own the lemon grove  
and no man is a slave.

**fp**

1s 6d - 25c

# Anarchy 5

A JOURNAL OF ANARCHIST IDEAS



It is interesting to note, since Mr. Thomas does not often allow himself to draw conclusions, that in his opinion: "Had the rebels risen in all the provinces in Spain on July 18 they would probably have been everywhere triumphant by July 22, when they expected to be. But had the . . . government distributed arms, and ordered the Civil Governors to do so too, thus using the working class to defend the Republic at the earliest opportunity, it is possible that the rising would have been crushed" (p.135). These conclusions, with their qualifying "probably" "it is possible that" do not reflect the modesty of the author, but are an illustration of Marx's strictures. In his conclusions Mr. Thomas has considered everything except the attitudes, the opinions of the working people. What he is saying in the two sentences quoted above is: "had the military uprising worked according to plan *and the workers remained passive* by July 22, Spain would have been in their hands. But *if the working class had supported the government*, and had the government distributed arms to them . . .". The facts are that the militant members of the workers organisations were not passive but neither were they prepared to sacrifice their lives simply to keep a particular government in power. And their actions in July 1936 made it clear that they intended to defeat the military uprising and at the same time carry through a far-reaching revolutionary programme which would render all governments redundant. As Brenan puts it:

The army then rose, expecting with its usual over-confidence to overwhelm the population of the towns within a few days. But the heroism of the working classes defeated this project and the revolution they had so long waited for, but would probably never have been able to launch themselves, began . . . Spain became the scene of a drama in which it seemed as if the fortunes of the civilised world were being played out in miniature. As in a crystal, those people who had eyes for the future looked, expecting to read there their own fate.

## II

APART FROM THE FACT that Mr. Thomas, a former civil servant, lacks the human sympathy without which it is impossible even to start understanding the Spanish people, let alone writing about their actions<sup>3</sup> during those momentous years, to this writer he gives the impression that he is more concerned with the techniques of writing than with the problems of writing history. For him adjectives are more important than factual accuracy. A serious history of the Spanish Civil War, especially when it has to be condensed within the limits of a 700 page volume, can well dispense with such details of the physical characteristics of the leading political figures in which Mr. Thomas displays an almost pathological interest. He wastes a whole page describing Manuel Azana, the Socialist President of the Republic, ranging from his academic qualifications to his physical deformities: "he was ugly. His face seemed likely to burst open with its spots, and its heavy jowls of fat". Mr. Thomas tells us, as if we might be interested, that Senor Azana "was accused of being a homosexual"; that the Communist leader Dolores Ibarruri (La Passionaria) was "always dressed in black" and that in

her young days, apart from being a Catholic, "had wandered from village to village in the Basque provinces, selling sardines from a great tray which she bore on her head"; or that one politician had big eyes in a small head and that another had a big stomach and a big appetite. If Mr. Thomas had the space to expatiate on the physical and psychological details of the "personalities in the civil war one would praise him for his thoroughness. But when one observes that he devotes more space to Azana's spots and homosexuality than he does to Juan Peiro who is dismissed as "a glass maker" or to Durruti and Ascaso "two inseparable men of violence"

together these two had committed many crimes of violence before setting up an Anarchist bookshop in Paris. Their most notorious crimes had been the murder of the Archbishop of Saragossa, the attempt on King Alfonso in 1921, the murder of the female lace-maker of Madrid, and the celebrated assault on the Bank of Spain at Gijon.

or to Federica Montseny "a formidable middle-class intellectual from Barcelona with remarkable powers of organisation"; that he gives almost as much importance to the Tragic Week of Barcelona of 1909 as to that of 1937; that he seems to consider the fact that Tom Wintringham, a member of the British contingent of the International Brigade, went to Bailliol College, Oxford (p.376) and that the Brigade "included a large number of Scots and some Welshmen" deserving of more space than the 3,000-strong anarchist "Iron column" whom he libellously dismisses as "the *cagoulards* of the Spanish Revolution who did not accept the entry of their leaders into the Government" (p.321)<sup>4</sup>, then there is clearly something wrong with his historical perspective.

Mr. Thomas apart from not being able to see the Spanish Civil War in its true perspective is at the same time a plagiarist in the worst sense of the word as we understand it. We are all plagiarists in that we draw on the thoughts, the investigations of those who precede us. But if anything we seek to add to or confirm what our predecessors or contemporaries have written. No so Mr. Thomas as we will show by illustrations later. Furthermore his book contains no new material except for the 35-volume official *Historia de la Cruzada* (Madrid 1940-1943) which is one of the sources he has found "invaluable" for his account of the rising in 1936. We cannot challenge his estimation of this source since we have not had an opportunity to consult it. We would be more surprised if such a work, especially since it was published in 1940-43 when nationalist fervour was at its height and the repression was in full swing, were either accurate or objective. But that apart, what confirms us in our opinion that *The Spanish Civil War* is not a serious work in the way Mr. Thomas "edits" material with which this writer is familiar. He also has a gift for mutilating facts (e.g. The May Days, the Columna de Hierro) as well as the material he plagiarises. Compare Thomas (p.15).

The ornate architecture favoured by the prosperous *bourgeoisie* was the vulgar backcloth to a mounting series of Anarchist crimes. These years culminated in "The Tragic Week of Barcelona" of 1909.



The Spanish Army had suffered an ignominious and crushing defeat at the hands of the Riffs, near Melilla. The Government ordered the Catalan reservists to Morocco in reinforcements. There ensued a week of rioting, in protest, at Barcelona. The riots apparently had no leadership and no aim, though it would seem probable that the Radical but anti-Catalan demagogue, Lerroux, did his best to stimulate the violence. Forty-eight churches and other religious institutions were burned. Drunken workers danced maniacally in the streets with the disinterred bodies of nuns. When the riots were quelled, the Catalan business men were generally ready to compromise with the government . . .

with the following passage from Brenan's *Spanish Labyrinth* (p.34)

In July, 1909 there occurred one of those small disasters in Morocco which the incompetence and lack of organisation of the Spanish Army were always provoking. A column of troops advancing a few miles beyond Melilla to take possession of some iron mines for which the Conde de Romanones had recently obtained the concession was ambushed by a handful of Moors and almost destroyed. To replace them the War Office called up the reserves in Catalonia.

It was a stupid and no doubt a deliberately provocative act . . . The reserves consisted of married men of the working classes . . . There were painful scenes at the station when the troops left, and the next day the whole city rose.

For six years Lerroux had been urging the populace to sack, burn and kill. Now that the moment had come he and his fellow-Radicals kept out of the way, but his young followers, the *Jovenes Barbaros* . . . let themselves go. The result was five days mob rule, in which the union leaders lost all control of their men and twenty-two churches and thirty-four convents were burned. Monks were killed, tombs were desecrated and strange and macabre scenes took place, as when workmen danced in the street with the disinterred mummies of nuns.

The riot was suppressed severely by La Cierva. One hundred and seventy-five workmen were shot in the streets and executions followed afterwards. Among the victims was Francisco Ferrer . . .

It will be noticed that Thomas in the first two sentences of the passage quoted contrives to link "a mounting series of anarchist crimes" with the "Tragic week of Barcelona" whereas as Brenan points out the latter was provoked by the call-up of reserves for Africa, and that "the whole city rose". Brenan makes it clear that it was the young followers of Lerroux who let themselves go; Thomas that it was "probable" that Lerroux "did his best to stimulate the violence", but he leaves the impression with the reader that the rioters must have been anarchists. Observe also the way Mr. Thomas the writer "improves" on Brenan. The latter wrote: ". . . tombs were desecrated and strange and macabre scenes took place, as when workmen danced in the street with the disinterred mummies of nuns". In Mr. Thomas' hands this becomes "Drunken workmen danced maniacally in the streets with the disinterred bodies of nuns". 22 Churches and 34 convents add up to 48 so far as Mr. Thomas is concerned. And note the way he concludes with a "when the riots were quelled" not considering it worth mentioning that 175 workmen were shot in the streets and executions followed afterwards, or that among them was Francisco Ferrer, a name still remembered with respect throughout the civilised world.

The serious reader should not fail to draw his conclusions from such distortions, nor excuse them on the grounds that Mr. Thomas is simply trying to produce a work of literature as well as a history. Gerald Brenan has shown that the facts of history can also be presented as a piece of great literature. In the 10-page Preface to the first edition of *The Spanish Labyrinth* he gives an account of the social background of Spain, so lucidly and concisely that one feels every word is essential to the text. By contrast Mr. Thomas suffers from an indigestion of adjectives and adverbs, which are repeated so often that the reader, apart from being irritated by them, attaches no significance to them; and it is also clear that he is unable to present a balanced picture from the mass of material which was at his disposal.

Mr. Thomas also considers himself a "dispassionate" observer. If by this he means that he can observe the events of 1936-39 without feeling we would agree. To our minds his is the most cynical book on the Civil War we have read so far. His pen portraits are nasty caricatures, and the constructive achievements of the Revolution are dismissed in a few insignificant paragraphs dotted about the book. His passionate dislike of the anarchists, on the other hand, never leaves him. He repeats Communist libels without questioning their veracity and does not hesitate to omit from quotations passages which are favourable to the anarchists. For instance of page 158 he quotes the famous interview between Companys and the Barcelona anarchist delegates. Thomas does a skilful piece of telescoping at one point which is worth noting:

"Today you are masters of the city!" He [Companys] paused, and then spoke deprecatingly of the part played by his own party in defeating the rising. "If you do not need me, or do not wish me to remain as President of Catalonia, tell me now, and I shall become one soldier more in the struggle against fascism."

The text from which the above extract has been taken (*de Julio a Julio*) reads as follows:

Today you are masters of the city and of Catalonia because you alone have defeated the fascist militarists and I hope you will not take offence if at this moment I remind you that you did not lack the help of the few or many loyal members of my party and of the guards and *mozos* . . . He paused for a moment and continued slowly: "But the truth is that, persecuted until the day before yesterday, today you have defeated the military and the fascists. I cannot then, knowing what and who you are, speak to you other than with sincerity. You have won and everything is in your hands; if you do not need me nor wish me to remain, etc. . . ."

### III

NO, MR. THOMAS, *The Spanish Civil War* is not a serious work and we have no hesitation in saying that the reviewers who have without exception hailed it as a noteworthy achievement reveal their own uninformed and superficial approach. It is significant that another book, *The Grand Camouflage: The Communist Conspiracy in the Spanish Civil War* by Burnett Bolloten<sup>5</sup> which appeared at the same time as Mr. Thomas' has either been ignored or, where it has been reviewed with



the Thomas book, received scant treatment. This is a pity because it is a so much more important work and in spite of the fact that it does not attempt to present a complete picture of the Civil War the reader will learn more from its 350 pages about the real issues in that struggle than from the 700 pages of Thomas' comprehensive "history".

The rôle of the Communists in Spain appeared to the liberals and intellectuals of the Left as salutary and invaluable not only because Russia was not then the dominating political power it has now become, or because these intellectuals above all feared fascism and nazism and the general drift to the Right, but also because the image of a Spanish Republican government legally elected by the people, and struggling valiantly in defence of democracy against fascist generals had been firmly fixed by the liberal and fellow-travelling as well as communist publicists from the beginning of the uprising. The plan of Thomas' book, and the gushing reviews he has been accorded by the Crossmans *et alia* shows that these people have still not understood what happened in July 1936 in Spain, and would probably still argue that but for the "discipline" of the Communists, the aid from Russia, and the International Brigades, the Republic would have been defeated long before it was.

Now the other point of view which was supported by the anarchists and a few revolutionary socialists throughout the world was that the military rising in July 1936 was repulsed by an important section of the people who had no more intention of defending the Republic than the Republic had of opposing the rising if it meant arming the people. The military rising in fact sparked off the Social Revolution. If then one considers that for a very large number of people the armed struggle against Franco had meaning so long as there was a social revolution to defend, then the rôle of the Communists in seeking to re-establish a central authority, disarm the people and create a military machine which was militarily speaking more efficient but also under the control of the political leaders, and finally, when they had the military power, to use it to destroy the social revolution by terror tactics, political intrigue, and economic blackmail . . . must be viewed as blatantly counter-revolutionary and reactionary.

Even taking into account that the scope of our authors is different a comparison of the sectional headings of the two works is revealing.

Thomas. I. The Origins of the War (110 pages). II. Rising and Revolution (80 pages)<sup>6</sup>. III. European Embroilment (100 pages). IV. The Siege of Madrid (80 pages). V. The War in the North (90 pages). VI. The War of Attrition (50 pages). VII. The End of the War (50 pages).

Bolloten: I. The Spanish Revolution (38 pages). II. The Rise of the Communists (52 pages). III. Curbing the Revolution (42 pages). IV. From the Revolutionary Militia to a Regular Army (80 pages). V. The Communist Triumph (39 pages).

The reason why Mr. Bolloten's book is more interesting than the title would lead one to believe is that in order to analyse the counter-revolutionary rôle of the Communists he first had to give the reader a picture of the social revolution that took place and this he does in

chapter after chapter with references which sometimes occupy more space than his text. For instance the chapter on The Revolution in the Countryside is only twenty pages long of which more than seven are source references. But in those references is material for a large volume.

The reason why Mr. Thomas' book is less interesting than its title would lead us to believe is that he sees it as a struggle between politicians and between military leaders and one has only to read through the list of names of people who helped him and learn that in 1959 Mr. Thomas made a tour of the principal battlefields of the war, to appreciate this. But when will it be realised that the most significant period of the Civil War were the early months when even the Communist leader, Dolores Ibarruri, had to admit "that the whole state apparatus was destroyed and state power lay in the street". History was made by the people in arms, but the workers seizing the factories and the peasants the land and working them in the interests of the community. Mistakes were made; there were many cases of injustice and unnecessary violence which anarchists have been the first to denounce publicly.

In which revolution have there been no injustices? But how many revolutions have truly been made by the people and how many have been as rich in social awareness and imbued with ideas of social justice as the Spanish Revolution of 1936?

#### IV

NO SERIOUS HISTORIAN of the Spanish Revolution can surely fail to be impressed by this deep social consciousness among such a large section of the working people. The Marxist taunt that a large anarchist movement was only possible in a backward, rural country like Spain overlooks the fact that the strongholds of Spanish anarchism were in the industrial part of Catalonia as well as in the rural deserts of Andalusia; it also overlooks the fact that the equally poor, illiterate peasants of Sicily, for instance, are Church-ridden, Saint-ridden, superstitious, monarchy-worshipping reactionaries; or that the highly paid, highly-organised industrial workers of Western Europe haven't two revolutionary ideas to knock together.

The strength of the Spanish workers lay in the fact that at least that half who belonged to the CNT not only believed in the need to struggle against the employing class and all governments to wrest from them better working and living conditions, but at the same time never lost sight of their long-term objective: the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of the free society—or *Comunismo Libertario* as they called it.

Throughout its history the CNT has been a movement of ideas and of action, a resilient movement which managed to survive long periods of repression and illegality. Its outstanding men of action have sometimes enjoyed the kind of hero-worship which has harmed them as well as the movement. And of course July 1936 was a period



of action and great heroism, as well as of much confusion during which many decisions affecting the lives and future of millions of people had to be taken. The tendency for the men of action to take the decisions while the workers were doing the fighting and carrying through the social revolution in the factories and on the land was perhaps difficult to avoid. One thing is certain that the decision of the CNT to enter the Caballero government was taken by the leaders and as Mr. Bolleten puts it "in violation of democratic principle, it had been taken without consulting the rank and file". This was a capital mistake which deeply divided the movement, demoralised those of its members manning the fronts and gave the Communists—whose ranks had been swollen by the entry of shopkeepers and small farmers who saw in them staunch defenders of private property, and whose influence had increased out of all proportion as a result of Russian aid (paid for in gold)—their opportunity to demand the nationalisation of collectivised industries and government intervention in those agricultural collectives which had been set up all over Spain on the morrow of the uprising.

In wanting to "win the war" the anarchist and syndicalist leaders sacrificed the revolution and in sacrificing the revolution they could not hope to win the war. The history of this revolution that failed has still to be written and it will come as a revelation to those liberals and intellectuals of the '30's who were brain-washed into believing that the Spanish workers were fighting and dying to save a moribund republic and a bunch of vain, intriguing politicians. They will realise, as Mr. Bolleten put it, that in July 1936 the Spanish workers had set in motion a far-reaching social revolution "more profound in some respects than the Bolshevik Revolution in its early stages" and who knows, they may even at this late hour feel the weight of their responsibility in letting it die as they sang the praises of democracy and legally elected governments.

V.R.

<sup>1</sup> Eyre & Spottiswoode (London 1961, 42s.)

<sup>2</sup> In *Historia de la Guerra de España* (Buenos Aires 1940).

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Brenan concludes his Preface to *The Spanish Labyrinth* with these words: To express here what I owe to the Spanish people for the kindness and hospitality I received from them during the years I spent among them would be impossible. This book, which I began in order to distract my mind from the horrors and suspense of the Civil War, is simply one more proof of the deep and lasting impression which Spain makes on those who know her.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Thomas who was only four years old at the time of the Spanish Civil War and the *cagoulards* outbreak in France, may be forgiven for his ignorance, for obviously no-one who knows anything about the *cagoulards*, the hooded ones, a fascist organisation would be so foolish as to compare the Columna de Hierro with them.

<sup>5</sup> Hollis & Carter (London 1961, 30s.)

<sup>6</sup> of which all but 9 are devoted to the Rising, and the summary of that 9-page chapter on the revolution reads: The revolution—the churches burn—estimates for the number of working class and Republican assassinations—*Seizemille* *pretres*—the *checas*—terrible events in Ciudad Real—responsibility of the Government. In other words, 9 pages of gory details of priest killings, personal vendettas, and a ludicrous story of anarchists taking their victims by car to admire the "superb Bay of Sitges" before they shot them.

## The historical background: Brenan's Spanish Labyrinth

MARIE LOUISE BERNERI

BOOKS ABOUT SPAIN HAVE BEEN written either by learned professors who write history ignoring completely working class movements and the existence of the class struggle and who therefore put fanciful interpretations on events they are unable to understand, or by journalists who feel qualified to write about Spain after spending only a few days or a few weeks in the country and without having acquired any previous knowledge of the historical background of the people. Such books sometimes contain brilliant passages, like Borkenau's *Spanish Cockpit* or George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, but are also full of inexactitudes and hasty generalisations. They are also often written with a bias to suit the political fashion of the moment. Several books were written about the Spanish revolution which did not mention the work of the Anarchist movement or even its existence. On the other hand, because it is popular to boost the Communists, most of the work done during the revolution was attributed to them.

*The Spanish Labyrinth*\* stands apart from all these books, both for the erudition which the author displays and for his objective approach to the subject. Gerald Brenan did not use any expedient method to write this book. He has taken great pains to find the truth and to be fair to all the parties he deals with, and if sometimes the book contains inaccuracies one feels that they are due to misinformation rather than to political prejudice.

Brenan's book is made interesting and penetrating by his sympathy for the subject he has treated. He loves Spain and the Spaniards and has a particular understanding of the Spanish peasants among whom he lived so long, not as a tourist but as one of them, sharing their houses, their food, their talk, their songs and dances. An historian should attempt to experience in imagination the feelings and reactions of the people he describes, and he is able to do this only if he can, so to speak, put himself in their place. Brenan is extremely gifted in that respect. He has dealt with his subject not only as a scholar but also as an artist and a psychologist. This has enabled him to understand actions which, not being a revolutionary himself, he cannot approve, such as the burning of churches, the throwing of bombs, the killing of priests, the expropriation of landlords and many other acts of revolt of the Spanish workers. He sees these facts in their right perspective and makes fun

\**The Spanish Labyrinth* by Gerald Brenan, (Cambridge Paperbacks, 13s. 6d.).



of the reactionaries who, at the slightest movement of revolt among the masses, are prepared to see the whole working class as a mob of criminals. He effectively debunks atrocity stories, a task which, unfortunately, historians are not often willing to undertake, particularly when these stories are used to discredit national or class enemies. Brennan says that already in 1873 the most infamous stories were circulated against the Anarchists. The Carlists, who were the equivalent of the Fascists of to-day, issued two pseudo-anarchist papers to give more weight to their atrocity stories. The front page of one of them, *Los Descamisados* (The Shirtless), bore the following battle cry:

900,000 heads! Let us tear the vault of heaven as though it were a paper roof! Property is theft! Complete, utter social equality! Free Love!

After the Asturian rising of October 1934 accusations of atrocities were again circulated on a big scale against the revolutionary workers. Brennan says:

The most incredible tales were solemnly told and vouched for. The nuns at Oviedo were said to have been raped: the eyes of twenty children of the police at Trubia were said to have been put out: priests, monks and children had been burnt alive: whilst the priest of Suma de Lagreo was declared to have been murdered and his body hung on a hook with the notice "Pig's meat sold here" suspended over it. Although the most careful search by independent journalists and Radical deputies—members that is, of the party then in power—revealed no trace of any of these horrors, and although the considerable sums raised for the twenty blinded children had to be devoted to other purposes because none of these children could be found, these and other stories continued to be repeated in the Right-wing press for months afterwards.

Of the terrorist methods used by the Anarchists at the end of the last century Brennan gives a very penetrating explanation particularly important as these acts are almost universally condemned and are still held against Anarchism:

The nineties were everywhere the period of anarchist terrorism. We have seen how the loss of its working-class adherents and the stupidity of the police repression led to this. But there were other causes as well. The reign of the bourgeoisie was now at its height. The meanness, their philistinism, their insufferable self-righteousness weighed upon everything. They had created a world that was both dull and ugly and they were so firmly established in it that it seemed hopeless even to dream of revolution. The desire to shake by some violent action the complacency of this huge, inert and stagnant mass of middle-class opinion became irresistible. Artists and writers shared this feeling. One must put such books as Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and Huysman's *A Rebours*, Butler's and Wilde's epigrams and Nietzsche's savage outbursts in the same category as the bombs of the Anarchists. To shock, to infuriate, to register one's protest became the only thing that any decent or sensitive man could do.

One could make many more quotations to show that Brennan's

---

MARIE LOUISE BERNERI was an editor of *War Commentary* and later *Freedom*, until her death at the age of 31 in 1949. She was the author of *Journey Through Utopia* (Routledge) and *Neither East Nor West* (Freedom Press). Her article was originally written for *Now* in 1944 as a review of the original edition of Brennan's book.

attitude is not hampered by prejudices and that his judgments are not delivered according to a fixed code of bourgeois morality.

\* \* \*

*The Spanish Labyrinth* is divided into three parts. The first part describes the history of the *old régime*, and that is to say the political régimes in Spain from 1874 to 1931. This part is mostly a chronicle of events.

The second part which, from a social point of view, is the most interesting, deals in detail with *the conditions of the working classes* and contains a careful analysis of: the agrarian question, the Anarchists, the Anarcho-syndicalists, the Carlists, the Socialists.

The third part deals with the events in Spain after 1931, after the fall of the monarchy and the institution of the Republic. It contains a chapter on the history of the Popular Front and a short sketch on the history of the Civil War from 1936-39.

It will be seen that the number of subjects treated justifies the subtitle of the book: "An account of the social and political background of the Civil War." All the forces which came to clash during the revolution are analysed here from their birth and the study of this book is indispensable if one is to understand properly the Civil War itself.

Parts of the *Spanish Labyrinth* are of particular interest to Anarchists and I should like to deal with them at length at the risk of giving them a prominence which they do not attain in the book itself.

The first point of interest to Anarchists is the relation between Anarchism and the communalist movement in Spain. Spain resembles Europe of the Middle Ages, when communes had a great deal of autonomy and when each member played an active rôle in the running of the communities. Unlike the communes in Mediaeval Germany, France and Italy, which flourished mostly in the towns and were composed of artisans and merchants, the communes in Spain existed mostly in the countryside and were composed of peasants, herdsmen, shepherds. There were also communes of fishermen on the coast. Provincial and municipal feeling was therefore very strong and every town was the centre of an intense social life. This autonomy of the towns and villages allowed the full development of the people's initiative and rendered them for more individualistic than other nations, though at the same time developing the instinct of mutual aid which has elsewhere been atrophied by the growth of the state.

It is difficult to understand Spain if one has not read *Mutual Aid*, and, indeed, some of the pages of the *Spanish Labyrinth* would form a valuable supplement to Kropotkin's work. Spanish communalist institutions would have offered Kropotkin a tremendous amount of material to illustrate his theory of Mutual Aid, but it is probable that the material was not available to him at the time. Brennan's book has filled the gap to a great extent by giving examples of agricultural and fisherman's communities which have survived through centuries, independent of the central authority of the government. While communes in the rest of Europe were gradually absorbed by the state and had lost most of



their liberties and privileges by the middle of the XIIIth century they survived much longer in Spain.

There is of course nothing very remarkable about this communal system of cultivating the land. It was once general—in Russia (the *mir*), in Germany (the *flurzwang*), in England (the open-field system). What is, remarkable is that in Spain the villiage communities spontaneously developed on this basis an extensive system of municipal services, to the point of their sometimes reaching an advanced stage of communism . . . One may ask what there is in the Spanish character or in the economic circumstances of the country that has led to this surprising development. It is clear that the peculiar agrarian conditions of the Peninsula, the great isolation of the many villages and the delay in the growth of even an elementary capitalist system have all played their part. But they have not been the only factors at work. When one considers the number of guilds or confraternities that till recently owned land and worked it in common to provide old age and sickness insurance for their members: or such popular institutions as the Cort de la Seo at Valencia which regulated on a purely voluntary basis a complicated system of irrigation: or else the surprising development in recent years of productive co-operative societies in which peasants and fishermen acquired the instruments of their labour, the land they needed, the necessary installations and began to produce and sell in common: one has to recognise that the Spanish working-classes show a spontaneous talent for co-operation that exceeds anything that can be found to-day in other European countries.

When one takes into account the fertile growth of communistic institutions, the mutual aid displayed among peasants, fishermen and artisans, the spirit of independence in the towns and villages, it is not difficult to understand why anarchist ideas found such a propitious soil in Spain.

The theories of the Anarchists, and of Bakunin and Kropotkin in particular, are based on the belief that men are bound together by the instinct of mutual aid, that they can live happily and peacefully in a free society. Bakunin through his natural sympathy for the peasants, Kropotkin through his study of the life of animals, of the primitive societies and the Middle-Ages, had both reached the conclusion that men are able to live happily and show their social and creative abilities in a society free from any central and authaoritarian government.

These anarchist theories correspond to the experiences of the Spanish people. Wherever they were free to organise themselves independently they had improved their lot, but when the central government of Madrid through the landlords, the petty bureaucrats, the police and the army, interfered with their lives, it always brought them oppression and poverty. The Socialist party with its distrust of the social instincts of men, with its belief in a central, all-wise authority, went against the age-long experience of the Spanish workers and peasants. It demanded from them the surrender of the liberties they had fought hard to preserve through centuries and for that reason never acquired the influence which the Anarchist Movement attained.

Another cause for the rapid and extensive growth of the Anarchist Movement in Spain was, according to Brennan, the intense religious feelings of the people, particularly the peasants.

This may at first seem paradoxical. The Anarchists in Spain, perhaps more than in any other country, bitterly attacked religion and the Church. They issued hundreds of books and pamphlets denouncing the fallacy of religion and the corruption of the Church; they even went as far as burning churches and killing priests.

Brenan does not ignore this, but he distinguishes between the Christian beliefs of the Spanish masses and their intense dislike of the Church, and one must admit that his interpretation of the relation between religion and Anarchism is very convincing.

He describes the Spaniards, and in particular the peasants, as a very religious people. By religion he does not mean, of course, belief in and submission to the Church but a faith in spiritual values, in the need for men to reform themselves, in the fraternity which should exist among all men.

At the beginning of the XIXth century a general decay of religious faith took place, but religion had meant so much to the poor that they were left with the hunger for something to replace it and this could only be one of the political doctrines, Anarchism or Socialism. Anarchism by its insistence on brotherhood between men, on the necessity for a moral regeneration of mankind, on the need for faith, came nearer to the Christian ideas of the Spanish peasant than the dry, soulless, materialistic theories of the Marxists. The Spanish peasants took literally the frequent allusions in the Scriptures to the wickedness of the rich; the Church of course could not admit this. The Spanish people in their turn could not forgive the Church for having abandoned the teachings of Christ nor could the Church forgive them for interpreting to the letter the teachings of the gospels. Brennan suggests that the anger of the Spanish Anarchists against the Church is the anger of an intensely religious people who feel that they have been deserted and deceived.

Brenan foresaw that his interpretation would give rise to many criticisms (from the Anarchists and even more from religious people), and he says:

It may be thought that I have stressed too much the religious element because Spanish Anarchism is after all a political doctrine. But the aims of the Anarchists were always much wider and their teachings more personal than anything which can be included under the word politics. To individuals they offered a way of life: Anarchism had to be lived as well as worked for.

This is a very important point. The Anarchists do not aim only at changing the government or the system; they aim also at changing the people's mode of thinking and living, which has been warped by years of oppression.

Whatever the cause of this attitude, whether religious or otherwise, it is important to stress it. Anarchists are always accused of having a negative creed, but critics overlook that Anarchism through its attempts to render men better even under the present system is in fact doing some positive and very useful work.



Brenan has seen this very clearly and he refuses to judge the Anarchists through their material achievements alone. He does not consider merely the number of strikes they have carried out, the rises in wages they have obtained or the part they have played in the administration of the country. Their rôle, he says, should be judged not in political terms but in moral ones, a fact which is almost universally ignored.

For example, the rôle of Anarchists in educating the Spanish masses is often overlooked. While the Socialists thought that education was a matter for the state to deal with, the Anarchists believed in starting work immediately. As early as the middle of the last century Anarchists formed small circles in towns and villages which started night schools where many learned to read.

At the beginning of this century Anarchist propaganda spread rapidly through the country-side and it was always accompanied with efforts to educate the masses. The Anarchist press not only published books by Kropotkin, Bakunin and the Spanish Anarchist newspapers were avidly read. The Anarchist movement had several dailies, but more important perhaps was the great number of provincial papers. In a relatively small province like Andalusia by the end of 1918 more than 50 towns had libertarian newspapers of their own. The work of editing these newspapers must have provided the members of the movement with a good deal of education and experience. The work of F. Ferrer in setting up free schools, the first outside the control of the Church, is well known.

This education was not limited to book knowledge alone. Anarchists were expected to give a good example by their private lives. *Solidaridad Obrera*, the Anarchist daily, in an article published in 1922, says that the Anarchist should set out to have a moral ascendancy over others. He should obtain prestige in the eyes of the workers by his conduct in the street, in the workshop, in his home and during strikes.

They were equally anxious to bring honesty in the matter of sex. Brenan says;

Anarchists, it is true, believe in free love—everything, even love, must be free—but they do not believe in libertinage. So in Malaga they sent missions to the prostitutes. In Barcelona they cleaned up the cabarets and brothels with a thoroughness that the Spanish Church (which frowns on open vice, such as wearing a bathing dress without a skirt and sleeves, but shuts its eyes to 'safety valves') would never approve of.

The Anarchists tried to live up to their ideals within the movement itself. They had no paid bureaucracy like the other parties. In a country like Spain, where there is the greatest distrust for money and those who seek it, the attitude of the Anarchists brought them the sympathy of the masses. Brenan points out several times that the Anarchist leaders were never paid and that in 1918, when their trade union, the C.N.T., contained over a million members, it had only one paid secretary.

Brenan's book carries an encouraging message for the Anarchists. Though he himself considers Anarchism impracticable, he gives abun-

dant proofs that it is deeply rooted in Spain. Unlike Fascism and Communism, it would not have to rely on foreign influences to come into being.

The practice of mutual aid which maintained itself in the village and town communes, the aspiration of the Spanish people towards liberty, justice and the brotherhood of all men, their love of independence which gave rise to federalist aspirations, all point to the conclusion that only an anarchist system of society will be possible in Spain.

Here I must say, however, a few words of disagreement with Brenan's conclusions. Though he admits that the arbiters of Spain's destiny must be the worker and the peasant, he believes that a government (of the right kind of course) must control Spain. He does not say where a good government can be found. He declares that a government in Spain should not depend on the church, the army or the landlords; as on the other hand he does not seem to believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat (which he rightly condemns in Russia) it is difficult to see why he rejects so firmly the Anarchist solution.

He also advocates strongly the collectivisation of the land, but seems to expect that a "sensible government" could carry it out, when history shows that no government in Spain was ever prepared to go against the interests of the landlords.

I think that Brenan has emphasised too much the agrarian nature of Anarchism. This is probably due to the fact that he lived in Andalusia, a completely agricultural region. Incidentally, he was criticised on this point by H. N. Brainsford who reviewed his book in the *New Statesman*, and who said:

I witnessed their (the Anarchists') astonishing success during the civil war in running factories with high principles as their chief equipment, and I was deeply moved by the schools they established for the sorely tried children of Madrid.

Brenan also attaches, in my opinion, too much importance to the rivalry between Madrid and Barcelona. In his opinion all Castilians are authoritarians and all Catalans are independent and lovers of freedom. To maintain his thesis he makes certain errors of facts which it is not worth while to discuss here. He is again far from the truth when he attributes practically all the burning of churches to Anarchists; in fact the burning of churches occurred everywhere spontaneously, and took place sometimes in villages and towns where there were no Anarchists.

However, these are mostly details, and do not prevent the book from being a very serious contribution to the history of revolutionary movements. Brenan, who lived so long in Spain, seems to have been influenced by its communal institutions, and has written his book in the spirit of the craftsman of the Middle Ages. Like them he has produced his *chef-d'œuvre* which is the test of his love for his art and his respect for his fellow men for whom the book is written. *The Spanish Labyrinth* has been created with that painstaking and disinterested love which characterises all lasting works.



## May 1936: The Congress of Zaragoza

PHILIP HOLGATE

ON MAY 1st 1936 THE CNT held a national congress at Zaragoza, in an atmosphere of impending crisis. The Spanish general elections in February had resulted in the replacement of the right-wing government of the *Bieno Negro* (the 'two black years') by a parliament in which the parties of the left held a decisive majority.

The internal position of the CNT was not a happy one. In January and December 1933 it had been involved in unsuccessful revolutionary action and in December 1934 the rising of the Asturian miners had been savagely repressed. The Confederation was split, with one tendency, represented by the 'Manifesto of the Thirty', the *Treintistas*, advocating much closer ties with the socialist trade unions of the UGT, and a less intransigent approach to the dilemma of reform or revolution. The special problems facing the Congress were therefore to enquire into the risings of 1933 and 1934 and evaluate the rôle of the CNT in them; to discuss the continuing relevance of anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist principles to the critical situation then existing in Spain; to work out some kind of relationship between syndicalism and socialism and put it into practice in terms of a pact with the UGT; and to do all this under the shadow of a split in the organisation which everyone felt had to be healed as a matter of first importance. Besides these particular issues there were the usual reviews of activity and publications and the preparation of general statements on the Confederal attitude to the agricultural problems of Spain and its ideas for the future libertarian society.

It is therefore disappointing, in reading the published minutes of the Congress,\* to observe how much of it seems to have been spent in personal disputes about the credentials of one comrade, the conduct of another on a given occasion, whether the Congress should have been held in Zaragoza or not, and similar matters. The important work of preparing statements seems to have been referred to committees whose reports were accepted after very short debates.

The scission in the CNT had come into the open shortly after the advent of the Spanish Republic in 1931. The delegate of the Opposition (*Treintistas*) of Catalonia explained that

Our current wanted to make use of the time put at our disposal to build a powerful CNT. We felt that one of the prime tasks of that period had

\*El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza, Ediciones CNT, 1955.

to be to reach the young people who, without any ideological preparation, were coming towards us, and to make them ready for the outbreak of the revolution. We had to create in them a clear social consciousness which would greatly assist the CNT in making its revolution.

The other current believed in revolutionary circumstances, believed that the very conditions necessary for the transformation of society existed, and they worked in that direction.

However, the very period which gave the CNT a chance to build up, also gave the State time to put its house in order, a point made by the delegate of Fabric and Textiles of Barcelona:

In 1931 there were circumstances favourable to the proletariat, to our libertarian revolution, and to a transformation of society, that have not been repeated since. The régime was in a state of decomposition; the State was weak and had not yet consolidated itself in a position of power, the army weakened by indiscipline; a poorly manned Civil Guard; badly organised forces of public order and a timid bureaucracy. It was the very moment for our revolution. Anarchism had the right to bring about an institute a genuine régime of libertarian comradeship. Socialism had not attained the revolutionary prestige that it has today: it was a vacillating bourgeois party. We interpret this reality by saying, 'The further we are from the 14th April, the further we go from our revolution because we give the State time to reorganise itself and the counter-revolution'.

The real issue in everyone's mind was whether it was possible to

find any unity between these opposing currents which could be expressed in terms of a declaration of unity, and a single organisation. The declaration was drawn up and accepted, and the Opposition ceased to exist on paper, although as later events showed, its spirit lived on.

Discussion on the unsuccessful popular movements of 1933 and 1934 revealed the same kind of cleavage in the movement, between the comrades who looked on them as useful experiences, and only criticised the organisation for not having made a more whole-hearted attempt to exploit the opportunities which occurred, and those who were dubious about the possibility of a rising bringing about libertarian communism in such circumstances. Similarly when the subject of the alliance with the socialist UGT came up, one of the important questions was whether the CNT was or ever would be strong enough to make its own revolution, or whether effective participation in day-to-day activities demanded compromises and collaboration.

It is almost impossible to sum up this part of the debate from mere reading, and it could only be dealt with by someone who took part in the events. The questions that need answering are: To what extent were the mass of Spanish workers influenced by the CNT, and to what extent was the card-holding membership of the Confederation imbued with the libertarian ideology held by at least some of its militants?

When we turn to the actual statements drawn up by the Congress it is clear that no simple formula can sum up the attitude of the anarcho-syndicalists during this period. In its declaration on unemployment the Congress states that this is 'ultimately a product of the multiple contradictions of capitalism' and goes on to 'urge, then, that for the moral



and material health of humanity, that the working masses hasten to put an end to the capitalist régime and to organise the production and distribution of social wealth for themselves'. However, they did not intend to appear as pure idealists and so the declaration ends with demands for a thirty-six hour week, abolition of overtime, and the development of municipal works.

The statement on the political-military situation draws attention to the failure of parliament and the parties, the growing threat of fascism, and declares that the only solution lies in educating the people to want libertarian communism. It ends by calling for a revolutionary general strike in the event of a declaration of war.

The problem of choosing between a revolutionary and a reformist line also made itself felt in the declaration on agrarian reform. This recognised that a reform passed by law would not liberate the peasants, and it also recognised the possibility that its ameliorating effect might weaken the influence of revolutionary syndicalism among them. With this in view they proposed a programme of nine specific points demanding radical expropriation of big farmers, abolition of rents, and the introduction of irrigation schemes, agricultural colleges, and so on.

However, the most interesting of the resolutions of the Congress was that on 'The Confederal Conception of Libertarian Communism'. It is a powerful reply to the authoritarian socialist critics of Spanish anarchism, whether Spanish or foreign, who claim that the anarchists were just confused and generous-hearted people who did not know what they wanted.

The resolution begins nevertheless by drawing attention to the two currents of emphasis on the individual and social aspects of libertarianism respectively. It also disclaims any desire to present a blueprint for the future:

We all feel that to predict the structure of the future society would be absurd, since there is often a great chasm between theory and practice. We do not therefore fall into the error of the politicians who present well-defined solutions to all problems, which fail drastically in practice.

It goes on to criticise the prevailing conception of revolution as being a single violent act, and characterising revolution as beginning.

Firstly, as a psychological phenomenon in opposition to the state of things which oppresses the aspirations and needs of the individual.

Secondly as a social manifestation, when that feeling takes collective hold, it clashes with the forces of capitalism.

Thirdly, as organisation, when it feels the need to create a force capable of bringing about its biological conclusion.

The first tasks of the revolution are defined thus:

The violent aspect of the revolution having been concluded, the following will be declared abolished: private property, the State, the principle of authority, and consequently, the class division of men into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed.

Happy land!

Next comes a long section devoted to the details of the structure

of the communes and their federations. It is well-known anarcho-syndicalist theory, but it is worth mentioning some points about which individualist anarchists are not too happy, concerning the relations of the persons with the federal structure. The economic plan takes

as base (in the work place, in the Syndicate, in the Commune, in all the regulating organs of the new society) the producer, the individual as the cell, as the cornerstone of all social, economic and moral creation.

However, there was no doubt left that all good men would welcome the commune:

In accordance with the fundamental principles of libertarian communism, as we have stated above, all men will hasten to fulfil the voluntary duty—which will be converted into a true right when men work freely—of giving his assistance to the collective, according to his strength and capabilities, and the commune will accept the obligation of satisfying his needs.

Although no doubt meant in the best way, the imposition of 'voluntary duties' is not so appealing in the light of misplaced revolutions, besides which:

It is important to make it clear . . . that the early days of the revolution will not be easy . . . Any constructive period calls for sacrifice and individual and collective acceptance of efforts necessary for overcoming problems, and of not creating difficulties for the work of social reconstruction which we will all be realising in agreement.

On the other hand it is pointed out that the National Confederation of Communes will not be a uniform organisation. The example is given of a commune of delightfully-named 'naturistas-desnudistas', enemies of industrialisation, whose delegates attend a 'Congress of the Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes', which where necessary enters into relations with other communes. Even if the editors' tongues were in their cheeks in presenting the example, it is important that they could, in all sincerity, include it. Furthermore, although the network of federation is drawn in pretty closely, the following paragraph is revealing:

We consider that in time the new society should assure each commune of all the agricultural and industrial elements necessary for its autonomy, in accordance with the biological principle which affirms that the man, and in this case, the commune, is most free, who has least need of others.

Finally, after having described the ways in which the communes will take decisions, the declaration states:

All these functions will have no bureaucratic or executive character. Apart from those who work as technicians or simply statisticians, the rest will simply be carrying out their job as producers, gathered together at the end of the working day to discuss questions of detail which do not call for reference to a general assembly.

Not only economic and social organisation, but the very ideas of justice, love and education, are reviewed.

Libertarian communism is incompatible with any punitive régime, which implies the disappearance of the present system of punitive justice and all its instruments, such as prisons.

The committee considers.

Firstly, that man is not bad by nature, and that delinquency is the logical result of the state of social injustice in which we live.



Secondly, that when his needs are satisfied, and he is given rational and humane education, its causes will disappear.

Therefore we consider that when an individual falls down in his duties, either in the moral realm or as a producer, it will be for the assemblies of the people to find a just and harmonious solution to the case.

On the family and on sexual relations, the resolution points out that the family has fulfilled its duty and declares that the revolution will not involve an attack on the family. However

Libertarian communism proclaims free love, with no more regulation than the free will of the men and women concerned, guaranteeing the children with the security of the community.

Education was discussed in two stages; one designed for the immediate battle against illiteracy, and another the long-term development of a human system of education.

The resolution ended by declaring that when achieved, the revolution would be defended by the people in arms.

This declaration on 'The Confederal Conception of Libertarian Communism' carried unanimously by delegates speaking for a million workers represents the height of anarcho-syndicalist expression. To what extent did the individual members share its aspirations? To what extent was it the expression of a handful of militant anarchists kidding themselves that their own ideas were held throughout the CNT? How representative was the other side of the Congress with its violent personal and factional disputes? As the events fade into the past, these problems can only be unravelled by someone who shares a knowledge of Spain, a feeling for anarchism and the skill of a historian.

However, the fact that the workers of the CNT, in the face of oppression and persecution, and the imminence of a violent rising, could present such a clear and humanistic view of what they wanted society to be like, shows that they were the most socially conscious people that recent history has seen, and makes it even more tragic that circumstances conspired to prevent them from realising their desires.

#### GLOSSARY OF POLITICS IN ANTI-FRANCO SPAIN

CNT (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*—National Confederation of Labour). Revolutionary syndicalist union influenced by the anarchists.

FAI (*Federación Anarquista Iberica*—Anarchist Federation of Iberia).

UGT (*Unión General de Trabajadores*—General Workers' Union). Reformist trade union controlled by the socialists.

PSO (*Partido Socialista Obrero*—Workers' Socialist Party).

PCE (*Partido Comunista Español*—Spanish Communist Party).

PSUC (*Partido Socialista Unificat de Catalunya*—Catalan United Socialist Party). The combined Socialist and Communist parties of Catalonia.

POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*). Dissident revolutionary Communist party.

GENERALITAT: the government of the autonomous province of Catalonia.

## Some conclusions on the Spanish Collectives

### GASTON LEVAL

I WANT TO CALL ATTENTION to a curious fact: the failure of the top, the directors, the guiding heads. I am referring not only to the socialist and communist politicians, but also to the better-known anarchist militants, the 'leaders'. Spanish anarchism had a number of them. The ablest, Orobón Fernandez, died shortly before the revolution. A real sociologist, he had a broad and profound grasp of politics and economics. Others were highly-cultured persons, fine agitators, some of them notable orators, good journalists and writers; Federica Montseny was one of the most intelligent women in the intellectual life of the country.

But from the start these militants were absorbed in the official duties they accepted despite their traditional repugnance to government. The idea of anti-fascist unity had led them to this position: *It was necessary to keep quiet about principles, to make temporary concessions*. Hindered thereby from continuing to act as guides, they remained apart from the great work of reconstruction from which the proletariat will learn such precious lessons for the future. Without doubt they could still have given useful advice, they could have offered general principles for action and co-ordination. They did not. Why? It was because they were primarily demolishers. The struggle against State and capitalism had led them to subordinate all their culture and prestige to a political orientation. None of the best-known militants—apart from Noja Ruiz, and latterly Santillán—was competent to meet the economic problems of revolution. A constructive mentality, that can grasp the essentials of a chaotic situation and harmonize them in a comprehensive vision, is not improvised overnight.

Even some of the intellectuals who stayed out of official positions took no part in the work of transforming the society. How then was success possible? The reason was nothing else than the positive intelligence of the people. This was our secret strength.

*GASTON LEVAL spent many years in Spain and was the author of Nuestro Programa de Reconstrucción (Barcelona 1937), Social Reconstruction in Spain (Freedom Press 1938), L'Indispensable Révolution (Paris 1948) and Né Franco né Stalin (Milan 1952). His article is taken from the concluding chapter of the last of these books, the most thorough study yet made of the Spanish collectives.*



For decades, anarchist papers and reviews and pamphlets had been forming in militants a habit of acting individually, of taking initiative. They were not taught to wait for directives from above. They had always thought and acted for themselves—sometimes well, sometimes badly. Reading the paper, the review, the pamphlet, the book, each developed and enlarged his own personality. They were never given a dogma or a safe, uniform line of action. In the study of concrete problems, in the critique of economic and political ideas, clear ideas of revolution had gradually matured.

For some time, the problems of social reconstruction had been on the order of the day. Some of the better-known militants were rather scornful of the studies published by Puente, Besnard, Santillan, Orobon Fernandez, Noja Ruiz, Leval. But many of the more serious, and perhaps basically more intelligent, workers read them avidly. A great number of the 60,000 readers of the libertarian review *Studi* followed with interest the detailed articles on the problems a revolution faces, in food supply, fuel, or agriculture. Many syndicalist groupings did likewise. And when at the Saragossa Congress in May 1936, a renowned militant, who always displayed an olympian indifference toward such questions—later, he was just as good minister as bad organiser—presented an exposition of libertarian communism which revealed the lack of substance in his thought, the workers and peasants assembled from all the provinces showed their disapproval; for they knew quite well that social life must be thought of and organized in a more methodical way. All this study, together with the need for men of will and action in the social struggle, gave birth to the qualities that made possible the marvellous achievements of the agrarian collectives and the industrial organization.

The capacity of the people. That is, intelligence plus will. This is the secret. In this, not even the humblest labourers were lacking. I knew many syndicalist committee members who understood the problems of revolution and economic organisation very clearly. They spoke intelligently about raw materials, imports, the need to improve or eliminate this or that branch of industry, the armed defence, and other matters. The prompt reaction against the Control Committees which threatened, in the big cities, to become a new parasitic bureaucracy; the rapid decision to resist the attacks of the 18th and 19th of July; the rise of untrained military leaders (Durruti, Ortiz, Mera, Ascaso and others) to command over professional military men, are all facts that support my conclusions.

When I made my first visit to the Aragon front, my attention was attracted by the countenances of many of the young men in the trenches. There was clarity, serenity, firmness in their eyes; they had the faces of thoughtful men. I rode back to Barcelona with a comrade—the region's councillor for economics—who was going to Valencia to make a last desperate effort, through the central government, to save his companion, held by the fascists in Saragossa. He was a simple man,

in externals and in character. But a remarkable man. Although tormented by the fate of his companion, he explained to me about the new lands that had to be cultivated, about coal and iron and manganese mines that could be opened, about canals that ought to be dug, about trade with Catalonia, about the relations between collectivist and individualist peasants.

We spoke of electrification. He expounded to me a plan for a single network to unify the hydraulic resources and distribute the power equally among the socialised regions, and avoid the concentration of industry and the excessive, often unfair, specialisation of agriculture. His deep knowledge of the Spanish economy surprised me. He was a glass-maker, only 32 years old. Many ministers of economics and agriculture of the republic and the monarchy knew less than he about these subjects.

One day the secretary of the Peasants' Federation of Levante said to me:

"I want your advice, Gaston. We've been thinking of starting a bank . . ."

"A bank of your own?" I asked.

"Yes. You see, we need money to keep things moving between our collectivized villages, and for trade with other towns. With the export of oranges stopped, it's hard to get. Instead of helping, the government cuts the ground from under us. We've just about decided to have a bank of our own. The problem is whether we ought to start one with our own resources, or take over one that already exists . . ."

"How would you take it over?"

"By operations to make it lose money and accept our intervention."

I didn't have time to look into the plan closely. Some months later, I saw this peasant again—this peasant with the common-man look and the beret. He'd got his bank.

I was working on economic problems so they consulted me about everything. But how often nothing remained to be done, so well had they already planned it!

The revolution developed in extremely complicated circumstances. Attacks from within and without had to be fought off. It took fantastic efforts to put the anarchist principles into practice. But in many places it was done. The organisers found out how to get around everything. I repeat: it was possible because we had the intelligence of the people on our side. This is what finds the way, and meets the thousand needs of life and the revolution. It organised the militia and defeated fascism in the first phase of the war. It went to work instantly, to make armoured cars and rifles and guns. The initiative came from the people, above all from those influenced by the anarchists. For example the Aragon collectives: among their organisers I found only two lawyers, in Alcorina. They were not, strictly speaking, intellectuals. But if what they did, together with the peasant and worker comrades, was well done, it was no better than what could be seen in Esplugas, Binefar,



Calanda and other collectives. What was a surprise was to find that a great many of these peasants were illiterate. But they had faith, practical common sense, the spirit of sacrifice, the will to create a new world.

I don't want to make a demagogic apology for ignorance. Those men had a mentality, a heart, a spirit, of a kind that education cannot give and official education often smothers. Spiritual culture is not always bookish, and still less academic. It can arise from the very conditions of living, and when it does, it is more dynamic. By adapting themselves to what was being done, by co-ordinating the work, by suggesting general directions, by warning a certain region of industry against particular errors, by complementing one activity with another and harmonising the whole, by stimulating here and correcting there—in these ways great minds can undoubtedly be of immense service. In Spain they were lacking. It was not by the work of our intellectuals—more literary than sociological, more agitators than practical guides—that the future has been illuminated. And the peasants—libertarian or not—of Aragon, Levante, Castille, Estramadura, Andalusia, the workers of Catalonia, understood this and acted alone.

The intellectuals, by their ineptitude in practical work, were inferior to the peasants who made no political speeches but knew how to organise the new life. Not even the authors of the syndicalist health organisation in Catalonia were intellectuals. A Basque doctor with a will of iron, and a few comrades working in the hospitals, did everything. In other regions, talented professional men aided the movement. But there, too, the initiative came from below. Alcoy's industries, so well organised, were all managed by the workers, as were those of Elda and Castillon. In Carcagente, in Elda, in Granollers, in Binefar, in Jativa, in land transport, in marine transport, in the collectives of Castille, or in the semi-socialisation of Ripolls and Puigerdà—the militants at the bottom did everything.

As for the government, they were as inept in organising the economy as in organising the war.

## PRINCIPLES AND LESSONS

1. In juridical principles the collectives were something entirely new. They were not syndicates, nor were they municipalities in any traditional sense; they did not even very closely resemble the municipalities of the Middle Ages. Of the two, however, they were closer to the communal than the syndicalist spirit. Often they might just as well have been called communities, as for example the one in Binefar was. The collective was an entity; within it, occupational and professional groups, public services, trade and municipal functions were subordinate and dependent. In forms of organisation, in internal functioning, and in their specialised activities, however, they were autonomous.

2. The agrarian collectives, despite their name, were to all intents and purposes libertarian communist organisations. They applied the

rule "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." Where money was abolished, a certain quantity of goods was assured to each person; where money was retained, each family received a wage determined by the number of members. Though the technique varied, the moral principle and the practical results were the same.

3. In the agrarian collectives solidarity was carried to extreme lengths. Not only was every person assured of the necessities, but the district federations increasingly adopted the principle of mutual aid on an inter-collective scale. For this purpose they created common reserves to help out villages less favoured by nature. In Castille special institutions for this purpose were created. In industry this practice seems to have begun in Hospitalet, on the Catalan railways, and was applied later in Alcoy. Had the political compromise not impeded open socialisation, the practices of mutual aid would have been much more generalised.

4. A conquest of enormous importance was the right of women to livelihood, regardless of occupation or function. In about half of the agrarian collectives, women received the same wages as men; in the rest women received less, apparently on the principle that they rarely lived alone.

5. The child's right to livelihood was also ungrudgingly recognised: not as a state charity, but as a right no one dreamed of denying. The schools were open to children to the age of 14 or 15—the only guarantee that parents would not send their children to work sooner, and that education would really be universal.

6. In all the agrarian collectives of Aragon, Catalonia, Levante, Castille, Andalusia, and Estramadura, the workers formed groups to divide the labour or the land; usually they were assigned to definite areas. Delegates elected by the work-groups met with the collective's delegate for agriculture to plan out the work. This typical organisation arose quite spontaneously, by local initiative.

7. In addition to these methods—and similar meetings of specialised groups—the collective as a whole met in a weekly or bi-weekly or monthly assembly. This too was a spontaneous innovation. The assembly reviewed the activities of the councillors it named, and discussed special cases and unforeseen problems. All inhabitants—men and women, producers and non-producers—took part in the discussion and decisions. In many cases the 'individualists' (non-collective members) had equal rights in the assembly.

8. In land cultivation the most significant advances were: the rapidly increased use of machinery and irrigation; greater diversification; and forestation. In stock-raising: the selection and multiplication of breeds; the adaptation of breeds to local conditions; and large-scale construction of collective stock barns.

9. Production and trade were brought into increasing harmony and distribution became more and more unified; first district unification,



then regional unification, and finally the creation of a national federation. The district (*comarca*) was the basis of trade. In exceptional cases an isolated commune managed its own, on authority of the district federation which kept an eye on the commune and could intervene if its trading practices were harmful to the general economy. In Aragon the Federation of Collectives, founded in January 1937, began to co-ordinate trade among the communes of the region, and to create a system of mutual aid. The tendency to unity became more distinct with the adoption of a single "producer's card" and a single "consumer's card"—which implied suppression of all money, local and national—by a decision of the February 1937 Congress. Co-ordination of trade with other regions, and abroad, improved steadily. When disparities in exchange, or exceptionally high prices, created surpluses, they were used by the Regional Federation to help the poorer collectives. Solidarity thus extended beyond the district.

10. Industrial concentration—the elimination of small workshops and uneconomical factories—was a characteristic feature of collectivisation both in the rural communes and in the cities. Labour was rationalised on the basis of social need—in Alcoy's industries and in those of Hospitalet, in Barcelona's municipal transport and in the Aragon collectives.

11. The first step toward socialisation was frequently the dividing up of large estates (as in the Segorbe and Granollers districts and a number of Aragon villages). In certain other cases the first step was to force the municipalities to grant immediate reforms (municipalisation of land-rent and of medicine in Elda, Benicarlo, Castellone, Alcaniz, Caspe, etc.).

12. Education advanced at an unprecedented pace. Most of the partly or wholly socialised collectives and municipalities built at least one school. By 1938, for example, every collective in the Levante Federation had its own school.

13. The number of collectives increased steadily. The movement originated and progressed swiftly in Aragon, conquered part of Catalonia, then moved on to Levante and later Castille. According to reliable testimony the accomplishments in Castille may indeed have surpassed Levante and Aragon. Estramadura and the part of Andalusia not conquered immediately by the fascists—especially the province of Jaen—also had their collectives. The character of the collectives varied of course with local conditions.

14. We lack exact figures on the total number of collectives in Spain. Based on the incomplete statistics of the Congress in Aragon in February 1937, and on data gathered during my stay in this region, there were at least 400. In Levante in 1938 there were 500. To these must be added those of the other regions. The development and growth of the movement can be gauged from these figures: by February 1937 the District of Angues had 36 (figures given at the Congress). By June of the same year it had 57. In my investigation I found only two collectives which had failed: Boltona and Ainsa, in Northern Aragon.

15. Sometimes the collective was supplemented by other forms of socialisation. After I left Carcagente, trade was socialised. In Alcoy consumers co-operatives arose to round out the syndicalist organisation of production. There were other instances of the same kind.

16. The collectives were not created single-handed by the libertarian movement. Although their juridical principles were strictly anarchist, a great many collectives were created spontaneously by people remote from our movement ("libertarians" without being aware of it). Most of the Castille and Estramadura collectives were organised by Catholic and Socialist peasants; in some cases of course they may have been inspired by the propaganda of isolated anarchist militants. Although their organisation opposed the movement officially, many members of the UGT entered or organised collectives, as did republicans who sincerely wanted to achieve liberty and justice.

17. Small land-owners were respected. Their inclusion in the consumer's card system and in the collective trading, the resolutions taken in respect to them, all attest to this. There were just two restrictions: they could not have more land than they could cultivate, and they could not carry on private trade. Membership of the collective was voluntary: the "individualists" joined only if and when they were persuaded of the advantages of working in common.

18. The chief obstacles to the collectives were:

- (a) The existence of conservative strata, and parties and organisations representing them. Republicans of all factions, Socialist of left and right (Largo Caballero and Prieto), Stalinist Communists, and often the POUMists. (Before their expulsion from the Catalan government—the *Generalidad*—the POUMISTS were not a truly revolutionary party. They became so when driven into opposition. Even in June 1937, a manifesto distributed by the Aragon section of the POUM attacked the collectives). The UGT was the principal instrument of the various politicians.
- (b) The opposition of certain small landowners (Catalan and Pyrenean peasants).
- (c) The fear, even among some members of collectives, that the government would destroy the organisations once the war was over. Many who were not really reactionary, and many small landowners who would otherwise have joined the collectives, held back on this account.
- (d) The open attack on the collectives: by which is not meant the obviously destructive acts of the Franco troops wherever they advanced. In Castile the attack on the Collectives was conducted, arms in hand, by Communist troops. In the Valencia region, there were battles in which even armoured cars took part. In the Huesca province the Karl Marx brigade persecuted the collectives. The Macia-Companys brigade did the same in Teruel province. (But both always fled from combat with the fascists. The Karl



Marx brigade always remained inactive, while our troops fought for Huesca and other important points; the Marxist troops reserved themselves for the rearguard. The second gave up Vivel del Rio and other coal regions of Utrillos without a fight. These soldiers, who ran in panic before a small attack that other forces easily contained, were intrepid warriors against the unarmed peasants) of the collectives).

19. In the work of creation, transformation and socialisation, the peasant demonstrated a social conscience much superior to that of the city worker.

## A peasant experiment

H. E. KAMINSKI

THE VILLAGE OF ALCORA HAS ESTABLISHED "libertarian communism". One must not think that this system corresponds to scientific theories. Libertarian communism in Alcora is the work of the peasants who completely ignore all economic laws. The form which they have given to their community corresponds more in reality to the ideas of the early Christians than to those of our industrial epoch. The peasants want to have "everything in common" and they think that the best way to achieve equality for all is to abolish money. In fact money does not circulate amongst them any longer. Everybody receives what he needs. From whom? From the Committee, of course.

It is however impossible to provide for five thousand people through a single centre of distribution. Shops still exist in Alcora where it is possible to get what is necessary as before. But those shops are only distribution centres. They are the property of the whole village and the ex-owners do not make profits instead. The barber himself shaves only in exchange for a coupon. The coupons are distributed by the Committee. The principle according to which the needs of all the inhabitants will be satisfied is not perfectly put in practice as the coupons are distributed according to the idea that every body has the same needs. There is no individual discrimination; the family alone is recognised as a unit. Only unmarried people are considered as individuals.

Each family and person living alone has received a card. It is punched each day at the place of work, which nobody can therefore leave. The coupons are distributed according to the card. And here lies the great weakness of the system: for the lack hitherto of any other standard they have had to resort to money to measure the work done. Everybody,

---

*H. E. KAMINSKI'S article first appeared in his book *Ceux de Barcelone* (Paris 1937). Born in Germany, he died in France last year at the age of 75.*

workers, shopkeepers, doctors, receive for each day's work coupons to the value of five pesetas. On one side of the coupon the word bread is written; each coupon is worth one kilogram. But the other side of the coupon represents explicitly a counter-value in money. Nevertheless these coupons cannot be considered as bank-notes. They can only be exchanged against goods for consumption and in only a limited quantity. Even if the amount of coupons was greater it would be impossible to buy means of production and so become a capitalist, even on a small scale, for only consumer goods are on sale. The means of production are owned by the community. The community is represented by the Committee, here called the Regional Committee. It has in its hands all the money of Alcora, about a hundred thousand pesetas. The Committee exchanges the village products against products which it does not possess, and when it cannot obtain them by exchange it buys them. But money is considered as an unavoidable evil, only to be used as long as the rest of the world will not follow the example of Alcora.

The Committee is the *pater familias*. It possesses everything, it directs everything, it deals with everything. Each special desire should be submitted to it. It is, in the last resort, the only judge. One may object that the members of the Committee run the risk of becoming bureaucrats or even dictators. The peasants have thought about that too. They have decided that the Committee should be changed at frequent intervals so that every member of the village should be a member for a certain period.

There is something moving about the ingenuity of all this organisation. It would be a mistake to see in it anything more than a peasant attempt to establish libertarian communism and unfair to criticise it too seriously. One must not forget that the agricultural workers and even the shopkeepers of the village have lived very poorly up till now. Their needs are hardly differentiated. Before the revolution a piece of meat was a luxury for them; only a few intellectuals living among them wish for things beyond immediate necessities. The anarchist-communism of Alcora has taken its nature from the actual state of things. As a proof, one must observe that the family card puts the most oppressed human beings in Spain, the women, under the complete dependence of men.

"What happens", I ask, "if somebody wants to go to the city for example?"

"It is very simple", someone replies, "He goes to the Committee and exchanges his coupons for money."

"Then one can exchange as many coupons as one wants for money?"

"Of course not."

These good people are rather surprised that I understand so slowly.

"But when can one have money then?"

"As often as you need. You have only to tell the Committee."

"The Committee examines the reasons then?"

"Of course".



I am a little terrified. This organisation seems to me to leave very little liberty in a "libertarian communist" regime. I try to find reasons for travelling that the Alcora Committee would accept. I do not find very much but I continue my questioning.

"If somebody has a fiancée outside the village will he get the money to go and see her?"

The peasant reassures me: he will get it.

"As often as he wants?"

"Thank God, he can still go from Alcora to see his fiancée every evening if he wants to."

"But if somebody wants to go to the city to go to the cinema. Is he given money?"

"Yes."

"As often as he wants to?"

The peasant begins to have doubts about my reason.

"On holidays, of course. There is no money for vice."

I talked to a young, intelligent-looking peasant, and having made friends with him, I took him to one side and said to him:

"If I proposed to give you some bread coupons would you exchange them for money?"

My new friend thinks for a few moments and then says: "But you need bread too?"

"I don't like bread, I only like sweets. I would like to exchange all I earn for sweets."

The peasant understands the hypothesis very well, but he does not need to think very long; he starts laughing.

"It is quite simple! If you want sweets you should tell the Committee. We have enough sweets here. The Committee will give you a permit and you will go to the chemist and get them. In our village everybody receives what he needs."

After this answer I had to give up. These peasants no longer live in the capitalist system, neither from a moral nor a sentimental point of view. But did they ever live in it?

*The philosophy of the CNT is the anarcho-syndicalist philosophy . . . I had the good fortune to visit some of these CNT fishing towns, where the whole population lived in equality and where the catch was divided equally among them. Except in Israel, I doubt very much whether there are any communities in the world which express the spirit of co-operation and of equality in the same manner as did these villages I saw in Spain.*

—FENNER BROCKWAY in the House of Commons 6/3/1958.

## Notes in the margin

IT IS EXTRAORDINARY THAT the seizure of the land by the agricultural labourers and of the factories by the workers, in those parts of Spain where the Franco rebellion was successfully resisted in 1936, should be both the least-known and the most interesting aspect of the civil war in Spain.

We need to place their experience in the sociology of co-operative communities and non-capitalistic industrial organisation. Writers who have drawn attention to the social and industrial *malaises* of our society have paid a great deal of attention to collective experiments of one kind or another, for very good reasons. Erich Fromm, for example, in his book *The Sane Society*, after discussing the structure of the French *communautés du travail*, remarks that they

are not, of course, the only examples for the possibility of communitarian life. Whether we take Owen's communities, or those of the Mennonites or Hutterites, or the agricultural settlements of Israel, they all contribute to our knowledge of the possibilities of a new style of life. They also show that most of these communitarian experiments are executed by men with a shrewd intelligence, and an immense practical sense. They are by no means the dreamers our so-called realists believe them to be; on the contrary, they are more imaginative than our conventional business leaders appear to be. Undoubtedly there have been many shortcomings in the principles and practice of these experiments which must be recognised in order to be avoided.

The question is whether conditions similar to those created by the communitarians can be created for the whole of our society. The aim would then be to create a work situation in which man gives his lifetime and energy to something which has meaning for him; in which he knows what he is doing, has an influence on what is being done, and feels united with, rather than separated from, his fellow man.

Neither Fromm, nor Martin Buber, who discussed the same question in his *Paths in Utopia*, nor even the late Henrik Infield, who did more than anyone to promote the study of co-operative communities and especially to arrive at reliable means of evaluating them, mentioned the Spanish experience. We need to put the Spanish collectives "on the map" from the point of view of anarchist history and theory, from that of the advocate of workers' control, and from that of the sociologist and the student of the sociology of co-operation. We need to make illuminating comparisons with, for example, the Soviet *kolkhoz*, the Chinese commune, the Israeli *kvutza* and *kibbutz*, the Mexican *ejido*, the Indian *gramdan* villages, the Yugoslav "workers' collectives" and the rather more genuine workers' councils that sprang into a brief existence in Poland and Hungary in 1956.

"Were these collectives successful?" asks Brennan, and answers "There is a certain amount of evidence to show that they often were so to a surprising degree. Even so sceptical an observer as Dr. Borkenau



was struck by the effectiveness of some of the large industrial collectives in Barcelona, whilst most people are in agreement that those set up in the Catalan countryside worked admirably."

Now however you describe the large-scale urban collectives, or the re-organisation of the Catalan railways, or the amalgamation of the bus and tram companies in Barcelona, you cannot dismiss them as unimportant, still less as a manifestation of peasant millenarianism.

What are the sources for a study of the Spanish collectives? There are first of all pages 297-386 of Vol. 1 of Jose Peirats *La CNT en la Revolución Española* (Toulouse 1951) and the books of two foreign anarchists who travelled extensively in revolutionary Spain and made a special study of the collectives: Gaston Leval's *Né Franco né Stalin. Le collectivité anarchiche spagnole nella lotta contro Franco e la reazione staliniana* (Milan, 1952), the last fourteen of whose 320 pages appear in this issue of ANARCHY, and Augustin Souchy's books *Entre los Campesinos de Aragon* and *Colectivizaciones: La Obra Constructiva de la Revolución Española* (Barcelona, 1937). Then there is the copious anarchist press of the period. One great virtue of Mr. Bolloten's *The Grand Camouflage*, is that he gives hundreds of references in his footnotes to the contemporary press, indicating where information about collectives in particular places may be found.

Obviously a serious study requires a scrupulous examination of conflicting testimony, interviews with survivors, etc., as well as an acquaintance with the history of Spanish communal institutions (on which the classical work is Joachim Costa's *Collectivismo Agrario en España* (Madrid 1898, Buenos Aires 1944), that of peasant agitation in the South (J. Diaz del Moral: *Historia de las Agitaciones Campesinas Andaluzas* (Madrid 1929) and C. Bernaldo de Quiros: *El Espartaquismo Agrario Andaluz* (Madrid 1919)), and the history and origins of Spanish anarchism, on which, apart from anarchist sources, there is a recent book published in Spain, *Origenes del Anarquismo en Barcelona* (Barcelona 1959). There would also have to be considered, the preparatory work of generations, which profoundly influenced the course which the collectives took: the studies of the problems of social reconstruction which Leval mentions, a typical example of which has appeared in English (D. A. de Santillan: *After the Revolution* (New York, 1937)), and the educative work of thousands of unrecorded *obreros conscientes* in towns and villages, teaching themselves and their fellows. "Even today" writes Hobsbawm "when one asks the inhabitants of Casas Viejas about their impressions of the former militants, now often dead or dispersed, one is most likely to hear some such phrase as 'He was always reading something; always arguing'."

The kind of study which we need of the Spanish collectives would be fascinating, but would it be useful? Yes, if you believe that Spain has a future as well as a past.

## SPANISH REFUGEE AID

was formed in 1953 to assist the Spanish refugees, 150,000 of whom have been living in France often in misery and poverty, since 1939.

They lost their homes, health, jobs and country because they would not live under a dictatorship. Funds are needed for the FOYER PABLO CASALS, a centre for old people

at Montauban, France.

Hon. Chairmen: Pablo Casals, Lazaro Cardenas

Chairman: Mary McCarthy

Executive Secretary: Nancy MacDonald

80 East 11th Street, New York City, N.Y., U.S.A.

## FRANCO'S PRISONERS SPEAK

The letters and the lists of names and sentences reproduced in this pamphlet come from one of the Spanish prisons.

They are written by the prisoners.

They describe life in a Spanish prison.

The problem of the prison is the problem of Spain.

Here is the situation that the Franco regime is trying to hide from the outside world.

Obtainable for 1s. 6d. from

Spanish Ex-Servicemen's Association

c/o 210 Bravington Road, London, W.9.

## Solidaridad Obrera

Portavoz de la Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo de España

Precio: 0.30 NF semanal. Suscripcion: 15.60 NF el año.

## Suplemento Literario

de Solidaridad Obrera

Precio: 0.70 NF mensual. Suscripcion: 8.40 NF el año

(extranjero 10.00 NF).

Both from: 24 rue Ste-Marthe, Paris X.

## ONT

Organo de la CNT de España en Exilio

Precio: 0.30 NF semanal. Suscripcion: 15.60 NF el año.

## Genit

Revista Mensual

Precio: 1.00 NF

Both From: 4 rue Belfort, Toulouse (H-G) France.

## PUBLIC MEETING

TO COMMEMORATE THE SPANISH REVOLUTION  
AND TO EXPRESS SOLIDARITY WITH THE SPANISH PEOPLE.

Film: Fury over Spain.

Speakers from Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (in exile),

London Anarchist Group, Syndicalist Workers' Federation,

Freie Arbeiter Stimme Group.

6 pm SUNDAY JULY 16th 1961

at DENISON HOUSE, VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD, LONDON SW1